JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

MRS. RAYMOND WORST

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Interviewers	Interviewee
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March 26 1976 (date)	March 26 1976 (date)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Birth and Background ---------- 5

Summer Vacations ---------- 5,6

Dellwood Park ---------- 7

Living at the Canal Offices ---------- 7

Politics Causes Family to Move ---------- 8

Downtown Lockport Before the Sixties ---------- 9

Kindergarten and Other Teaching Positions ---------- 10

Husband's Background and Employment ---------- 11

The Depression ---------- 11

The Will County Historical Society Building ---------- 12

The Two World Wars and Their Effect on the Community ---------- 13

Grandfather's Store ---------- 14

Mother's Background ---------- 15

Hospitals ---------- 17

INTERVIEWER: Kathy Hessinger

INTERVIEWEE: Betty Worst

INTERVIEWER; This is an interview with Mrs. Raymond Worst for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Program at 539 East 11th Street, Lockport, Illinois, March 26, 1976, at 10;00 a. m.

HESSINGER; O. K. Mrs. Worst, let's begin a little by discussing your birth.

WORST; I was born in the house that I live in now. My father built the house when he married my mother many years ago. I lived in the house until I was about 12 years old and I moved into the building that is now the Will County Historical Society Building. In 1933 I moved back to my present residence.

HESSINGER; O. K., what was your father's name?

WORST; My father's name was John A. Walter.

HESSINGER; Were there a lot of other houses around here when you were very young?

WORST; Let's see, there were three houses on the east when my father built the house. The rest of the area was all woods.

HESSINGER: O. K., do you remember anything when you were a young girl, like games you played or family outings?

WORST: The much-looked-for vacation was every summer to get on

an interurban in Joliet and go to Starved Rock, cross the Illinois River on a ferry. We did that every summer and always I could take two or three girlfriends along with me and we'd spend about 2 or 3 weeks down at the hotel which in those days it was called, but now it is called the lodge. Each year, my father being the commissioner on the waterway, he traveled around to the different cities while my mother and we girls stayed down at Starved Rock. This was our vacation for many years.

HESSINGER: Oh!

WORST: This summer vacation was one thing that I always remember about my youth. Another thing that I remember was the beautiful park to the south of us, and about every other Sunday my father would take me out to Dellwood Park to listen to the band concert. And the intervening Sunday he would take me into Chicago on a train; we had one train from Lockport that left in the morning about ten o'clock and returned early evening. That was my once-a-month treat.

HESSINGER: What would you do in Chicago?

WORST: Oh, we'd go and eat, maybe as I got older we'd go to a movie, a park, etc. My mother was a great reader and so she'd stay home and read, and my father would take me on the train and we'd go into Chicago or otherwise we'd go back to Dellwood Park and listen to a band concert.

HESSINGER: Well, what was Dellwood like around this time?

WORST: Beautiful! It was a beautiful place! It was a beautiful place up into the '30's, a very lovely place. They had a scenic railway that, of course, you always rode on when you went there. They had a beautiful dance floor, they had a beautiful band shell, they had all kinds of concessions and it was a beautiful place.

HESSINGER: What was life like living at the canal office?

WORST: Well, it was great. We had the streetcar in front of us and the railroad behind us, and a beautiful big house to roam in with a beautiful back yard overlooking the railroad tracks. Those first couple of years I was there when I was 12 or 13 years old, as the trains would go by, the engineers would always waye at us, and, of course, we'd wait for regular trains, you know, and we'd get used to these certain engineers. The back yard was terraced and it was a beautiful place; and we had many, many, many parties there. The yard was filled with Japanese lanterns and beautiful flowers, and it was very gay. It was a place where all the young people that I went around with always gathered. They were always welcome. It was a place that they always had lots of good times.

HESSINGER: What did you -- did your father's job entail as commissioner?

WORST: Well, he visited all the locks up and down the canal. He would start in Channahon, Morris, Marseilles, Seneca, Ottawa, La Salle, all the way down to Peru. And he was in

charge of everything that came out of this office. All the enginners met here and all the men entailed in canal work assembled here.

HESSINGER: So then why was your father the last commissioner? What . . . .

WORST: He wasn't the last commissioner. We were the last family that lived in the house.

HESSINGER: Then why did you leave there? Why did your family leave?

WORST: My father was a died-in-the-wool Republican and it wouldn't have made any difference. He never would have asked for a Democratic ballot and he did work under one Democratic administration. All kinds of jobs like that are politically backwashed and my father worked under Governor Horner four years. And when Governor Horner's second term came up, my father went over to the polling place and asked for his regular Republican ballot and some important Democrat in Lockport wired Springfield that John Walter had asked for a Republican ballot and within a week he had a very lovely letter from Governor Horner saying, "I'm very sorry, we're very proud of the work you've done for the state, but with pressure put on it, you know, we have to do this . . . " He was a very broad-minded governor.

HESSINGER: So your family did a lot of entertaining at your house then?

WORST: Yes, and many prominent people were entertained here.

HESSINGER: Can you describe Lockport for me, like was it commercial or residential?

WORST: Lockport was a very lovely little town. The only thing I can say about it is, it's a very sharp contrast to what it is now. You went downtown and you knew everybody you met on the street. You knew everybody that ran the stores. If you went downtown and you didn't have a nickel and you needed something, there was no questioning, you know, you didn't have to have a credit card or references. It was just a lovely little town. You could go on the streets any time of day and I mean this was true, I'd say, up until, oh, maybe the late '40's, early '50's.

HESSINGER: Besides Dellwood what other kind of things did Lockport have to offer?

WORST: It didn't have a lot, but Dellwood was really great. The girls could go out to Dellwood unescorted, and on Sunday afternoons they always had matinee dances. High school girls could go out, anytime. We always walked to Dellwood. Dellwood Park was owned by an interurban company in those days. And it was a beautiful place.

HESSINGER: So then you went -- what was your first job?

WORST: My first job?

HESSINGER: Uh-huh.

WORST: Let's see. I had a private kindergarten here in Lockport

with another gal. We picked up our kids; it was sort of a chauffeur's school job. We picked up our kids from the Fairmont and Lockport area, and we took them over to the Methodist Church. We had maybe 20 kids and we charged them $5 a piece and found out that it wasn't a paying proposition, so then the School Board of District 91, where I taught for so many years, gave us a room; but we supplied all our own supplies. We took care of everything, all our equipment and that really wasn't a paying job, so in 1941 I went back to teach fourth grade in District 91. And when I started in 1941, I kept at it for 31 ½ years, in the same district.

HESSINGER: Well, what were some of your teaching experiences, like your early teaching experiences? Did you teach over at Central?

WORST: I taught -- I taught fourth grade and I taught remedial and I taught kindergarten over at the old school until 10 years ago, maybe '66. And then I went out to Kelvin Grove and I taught kindergarten. Then went to Milne Grove to teach first grade 2 years.

HESSINGER: What about the old Central Grade School Building? Did you have anything to do with that?

WORST: Why sure. Sure, I taught at the old Central Building until 1965, and then while I was in the old Central building I taught fourth grade, remedial, first and second, and kindergarten, in that old building. And then I went out to Kelvin

Grove and I stayed 5 years. And then I went to Milne Grove and I stayed 2 ½ years, and that was it.

HESSINGER: So then you married your husband, Raymond Worst, and tell me something, a little bit about his job?

WORST: Well, he was an industrial arts teacher in the city of Chicago for 35 years. He taught -- he had worked in every one of the shops. The last school he was at he was assistant principal in charge of 3,000 colored on the southwest side of Chicago. He always worked with handicapped, -- well, you shouldn't say handicapped; he always worked in vocational schools. He never worked in an ordinary school like we'd have here in Lockport or you'd have in Joliet. He had always worked in special schools. In the summertime he worked at Spalding and places where there were handicapped children.

HESSINGER: How was your family affected by the depression?

WORST: My family wasn't affected at all, it was just my husband. My husband was -- had been a Chicago school teacher when I married him. I married him in the depression, and he hadn't been getting paid for several years. But my family wasn't affected at all. In fact my mother took my husband's -- The Chicago school teachers (I'll backtrack) the Chicago school teachers were paid by script for many years, which when they used that script they lost maybe 30 percent on the dollar. So my mother took my husband's script at full value. She never did loose it but she took it, so we lost nothing on

that for a couple of years. We were very lucky. Because you know it was very bad.

HESSINGER: How did it effect the community around here?

WORST: I don't think it effected the community too much. Of course, in 1931, the year I was married, was the year that all the banks had foreclosed. We had one bank here that was pretty solvent. But I don't believe it hit this community too badly. People nowadays, I don't think could appreciate it. Even though I didn't suffer by it, I remember how it was because you just didn't have the money you have now and you didn't want the things that you want now.

HESSINGER: What happened to the canal office after you moved out of it?

WORST: Well, it was taken over by the state, and just used for state offices, the residence part and the office proper. And it was left, had gotten -- in a very bad condition until our people from the Historical -- Will County Historical Society took it over.

HESSINGER: Was there anything that motivated them to redo the place?

WORST: Well, it is one of the most valuable buildings in the State of Illinois. And they've worked like blazes. Most of their work is volunteer. Now they are putting a roof on it. Almost all their manpower is voluntary.

HESSINGER: How did any of the wars, like World War I, or World War II effect the community here, could you tell me, like economical advantages?

WORST: Well, of course, many, many, young men were killed in this community. Actually I don't remember so much about World War I, because I was born in 1910, so I wouldn't remember too much about that. I think the Second World War people kind of tightened up their belts. But I don't think, really, it effected the economic standards of this area much.

HESSINGER: What was the attitude towards the German-Americans? Can you tell if there were any . . . . ?

WORST: Well, of course, I'm German all the way through /Laughter/ I have nothing in me except German on my side and my husband's side. There was an antagonistic feeling toward them, there's no doubt about that, no doubt that there was a feeling.

HESSINGER: Did you feel that you were at a disadvantage at all?

WORST: You mean being German?

HESSINGER: Yes.

WORST: Oh, no, no, no, no. My grandparents were both born in Germany. And my husband's grandparents were both born in Germany. My father was brought to -- my grandfather was brought to Lockport when he was a boy, of oh, I suppose maybe

12 or 13. Do you know the store on the corner of 9th and State Street which is Cornolo's.

HESSINGER: Uh-huh.

WORST: Well, that was my grandfather's; my grandfather opened that store. And then one of his sons operated it for many years until he sold it to Mr. Cornolo in the thirties.

HESSINGER: What kind of store was it?

WORST: It was a grocery store. My father's family's home, -- the original home is, still located just across from -- do you know where St. Joseph's Church is, in Lockport?

HESSINGER: Uh-huh.

WORST: Well, that whole square block from Fourth and Fifth, from Madison and Jefferson, was all the Walter lot; and the original house is sitting there now. And I can remember I was only about 12 or 13 when my grandfather, who had been a war yeteran, was carried out of that house. The house is remodeled, but the original house is right there. And then the lot has been subdivided and I think there's about four houses there now. That was where my father was born, in that house.

HESSINGER: Oh, your father was born . . . .

WORST: My father was born in that house.

HESSINGER: So your family has lived in the Lockport community for quite a while.

WORST: My father, yes. My mother was from Freeport, Illinois. My mother had a very interesting -- is this being taped?

HESSINGER: Yes.

WORST: Well, should we shut it off, or . . . .

HESSINGER: No, that's fine.

WORST: My mother had a very interesting life. My mother was a very quiet lady. She had been educated at Mount Holyoke College, and in those days a girls' school you know was quite the thing, to be sent from the west to the east. She had been educated and she came to Lockport when she was out of college to teach Latin. And the high school was where the old grade school is now; that was high school and grade school combined. And she was the Latin teacher. And my sister's say -- well, I know from the pictures -- well, I have two sisters, two older sisters and one younger -- my two older sisters say that our mother was a very beautiful young woman and she married a man from Lockport that fell in love with her and married her and she taught I think a year or two here and she had two children and there was an epidemic of pneumonia that came through this area and her good-looking, young husband -- died within a week, leaving her with a three-year-old and a five-year-old little girl. Well, I know from the years of being around my mother, she really didn't think school teaching was the loveliest profession there was because she always said to us, "Oh, don't go into teaching." We all three of us did,

/Laughter/ but anyhow, she lost her husband and she lived in a house down here on 14th Street; it's still occupied. She went back home to her mother in Freeport, took a business course, and came back to Lockport. Lockport had a huge papermill over across 10th Street. You know where 10th and State Street is?

HESSINGER: Uh-huh.

WORST: Well, a Mr. Hiram Norton used to have a papermill over there. And my mother came back to Lockport to work as his secretary. Now, I didn't know all this until my husband passed away ten years ago when I was out visiting my sister in Phoenix, and we'd sit up nights talking about old times and she'd got to telling these things about my mother and I said "Gee, our quiet mother, I didn't know all these romantic things about her!" She said my mother came back to work for Hiram Norton. My father was the only man in this area that had a bachelor's apartment, and he had the apartment over his father's store; that would be on State and Ninth Street. And he fell in love with my mother. My sister said that she was still a very beautiful young woman and very young woman and very young and so he built this house and married my mother. They were married in 1908, and I was born in 1910. But I had never known anything about that romance. She had never told me a thing; I didn't know a thing about it until 10 years ago when I spent a couple weeks out in Phoenix and I thought that was so cute.

HESSINGER: Did she ever tell you anything about like how you were born, cause you were born in this house?

WORST: I was born in this house, and I know all they did in those days was have the doctor and they always had a trained nurse and that was it. A woman never went to the hospital. Ladies never went to the hospital to have a baby. In fact I was born in the same room I sleep in every night, that big room you know, that I showed you upstairs.

HESSINGER: Were there any . . .

WORST: My mother died in that room, by the way, too, because she was living with me then.

HESSINGER: Were there any hospitals in this area at all, a long time ago?

WORST: Sure. Silver Cross and St. Joseph's, I think. When I was eight or nine years old I had my tonsils out at Silver Cross.

INDEX

Assistant Principal, 11

bachelor's apartment, 16
band concert, 6
band shell, 7
banks, 12
births, 17
business course, 16

canal, 7
canal office(s), 7, 8, 12
Central School, 10
Channahon, 7
Chicago, 6, 11
Chicago school teacher, 11
Commissioner (on the Waterway), 6, 7, 8
community, 12, 14
concessions, (Dellwood), 7

Dellwood Park, 6, 9
Democratic, 8
depression, 11
doctor, 17

engineers, canal, 8; train, 7
epidemic, 15

Fairmont area, 10
family, 11
ferry, 6
Fifth Street, 14
Fourth Street, 14
Fourteenth Street, 16
Freeport, IL 15, 16

games, 5
German-Americans, 13
Germany, 13
grade school, 15
grandparents, 13, 14
grocery store, 14

handicapped, the, 15
high school, 15
Horner, Governor, 8
hospital, 17
hotel, (Starved Rock), 6
husband, 11,12,16

Illinois River, 6
interurban, 6, 9
Jefferson Street, 14
Joliet, 6, 11

Kelvin Grove School, 10, 11
kindergarten, 9, 10

LaSalle, IL, 7
Latin, 15
Lockport, 6, 8-11, 13-15
locks, 7
lodge, Starved Rock, 6

Madison Street, 14
Marseilles, IL, 7
matinee dances, 9
Methodist Church, 10
Milne Grove School, 10, 11
Morris, IL, 7
Mount Holyoke College, 15
movie, 6

Ninth Street, 14, 16
Norton, Mr. Hiram, 16
nurse, 17

Ottawa, IL, 7
outings, 5

papermill, 16
parents, 5-6, 11, 14-15
park, (Chicago), 6
parties, 7
pavillion, 7 (dance floor)
Peru, IL, 7
Phoenix, AZ, 16
pneumonia (epidemic), 15

railroad, 7
Republican, 8

St. Jospeh's Church, 14
St. Jospeh's Hospital, 17
scenic railway, 7
School District #91, 10
script, 11
Seneca, IL, 7
Silver Cross Hospital, 7
sister(s), 15, 16
Spaulding School, 11
Springfield, IL, 8

State of Illinois, 8, 12
State Street, 14, 16

Tenth Street, 16
train(s), 6, 7

vacation, 5, 6
vocational schools, 11

Walter, John A., 5, 8
Walter lot, the, 14
waterway, the, 6
Will County Historical Society
Building, 5, 12
World War I, 13
World War II, , 13
Worst, Raymond, 11, 12